

CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY, 2014 AT 6.00 P.M. AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE

Panel Members Present

Councillor B. Cassidy (Chair)
Councillor R. Martin (Vice Chair)
Councillor D. Shires
Councillor P. Lane
Councillor T. Jukes
Councillor E. Hughes

Non elected non voting Members present

R. Bragger (Primary Teacher Representative)

Portfolio holder present

Councillor R. Andrew

Officers Present

Rose Collinson - Interim Executive Director,
Children's Services;
Sue Butcher - Interim Assistant Director, Specialist
Services
Louise Hughes – Assistant Director – Preventative
and Targeted Services
Dan Mortiboys – Senior Finance Manager
Alan Michell – Head of Service
Andrea Potts – Head of Service
Sue Morgan - Strategic Lead - Early Intervention &
Family Support
Jane Kaur Gill – Regeneration Employment & Skills
Manager
Karen Marcroft - QA and Performance Information
Manager (Head of Service)
Neil Picken – Senior Committee Business and
Governance Manager

386/14 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr S., Raynor, Mr D. Blackwell and Councillor G. Perry.

387/14 SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

388/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND PARTY WHIP

There were no declarations of interest or party whip identified at this meeting.

389/14 **MINUTES**

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January, 2014.

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January, 2014, a copy having previously been circulated, be approved as a true and accurate record.

390/14 **3rd QUARTER PERFORMANCE MONITORING POSITION**

The Senior Finance Manager presented the predicted revenue and capital outturn position for 2013/14, based on the performance for quarter 3 (April to December, 2013) for services within the remit of the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel.

The Chair noted, with concern, that the predicted revenue overspend was £2.236m, a significant increase to the predicted revenue overspend detailed in quarter 2. This was a worrying increase.

A Member questioned what impact the increase in the number of Looked After Children (LAC) had on the budget? Officers advised that the level of LAC was currently 615 although it fluctuated between 610 and 615. The number of LAC did impact on the budget and a LAC project group had been established to address this issue. Part of this process involved data cleansing on the PARIS system to ensure that records were up to date and accurate. There are also a number of children who are accommodated under s20 of the Children Act and it is possible that a small cohort of them could return home with the appropriate support. The Think Family Team was working on this and it was anticipated that some of the children could be home by the end of April, 2014. The Think Family Team was also working alongside the Multi Agency Screening Team to offer immediate support to families rather than their children becoming looked after. In addition the average duration of care proceedings has reduced from over a year to 30 weeks. This will increase the number of children in the Councils care in the first instance as a number of older cases were still being dealt with. To respond to the increased demand for placements the fostering recruitment campaign had been re-energised and a number of suitability assessments are now underway.

It was emphasised that it was important to consolidate the way children come into and through the care system. The issue was not solely about admissions but also about timely and effective discharges from being looked after. The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) stated that the authority could not simply 'close the front door' as this carried significant risk.

A Councillor observed that each of these initiatives would help in future but stressed that there was the present to consider. It was asked how the need for agency staff was balanced with an increasing projected overspend?

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that it was a challenge to become sustainable. There were no quick fixes as the flow could not be stopped as it was not safe to do so. Every effort was being made to be effective and sustainable.

The Chair asked officers to explain the balance of newly qualified social workers to agency staff as it was not a case of one in one out. Another member asked how the appointment of newly qualified social workers would impact on the forecasted budget? Officers advised that the appointment of newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) does have a negative impact on the budget initially as they are unable to take on full and complex caseloads until they complete their assessed and supported year in practice and gain in experience. Experienced agency staff were still required to 'bridge the gap'. It was suggested that pressure on the budget would reduce when newly qualified staff became able to take on full responsibilities, as this would enable the number of agency staff to be reduced.

The Chair asked what the Leader of the Council's view on the budget overspend was? The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that the matter had been thought through. It was acknowledged that agency staff could not simply be removed. Funding had been allocated for 12 more permanent social workers. Appointments had been made, however, they were not necessarily experienced staff. Recruitment is ongoing and every effort was being made to attract experienced staff. The interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that they had been successful in recruiting to positions, however, these were predominantly NQSWs and not experienced social workers. In order for a team to be sustainable only 2 NQSWs should be in a team at any one time, 1 at the start of their first year and 1 toward the end. It was reiterated that NQSWs could not carry the complexity of cases and so agency staff were required to 'bridge the gap' until the NQSW had completed their training. The interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) commented that the NQSWs recruited so far are of a high calibre and they will grow into managing complex cases and thus reduce the need for agency staff.

The rigour of the appointment process was explained with assurances given that only the best applicants were successful. The Council had engaged in a 'step up to social work' graduate scheme which was only available to students achieving a 2.1 or above in their first degree. There was still a knock on effect on case work so it was a careful balance to place individuals in the right place. Consideration had been given to social workers transferring from adult services into Children's social care, supported by an eight week learning and trial period. Three offers had been made to adult workers but only one worker had engaged in the trial and was doing well to date. The team in which she is based are also benefitting from her wider knowledge. In relation to team manager posts it was explained that this was still an area which was proving difficult to make appointments.

A councillor asked whether progress was being made in encouraging agency staff to become full time employees? In response, the Interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that many agency staff chose to remain so for a variety of reasons although 2 agency staff were considering becoming staff. It was also stated that many agency staff were experienced which was beneficial, especially at team manager level. The rates of pay for full time employees are now competitive and so that was not an impediment to recruitment.

The Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) explained that Walsall was seen as a 'no blame, no hiding' and safe culture and one that learns from situations. It was important to retain that as it was viewed positively by prospective employees.

A Councillor enquired as to whether the welfare reforms and recession were having an impact on LAC. In response, the Interim Executive Director (Children's Services) advised that there she had recently submitted a report to the Welfare Reform Working Group, led by Corporate Scrutiny Panel. The report would be circulated to members of the Panel. The interim Assistant Director (Specialist Services) advised that it was having an impact on other more unexpected parts of the service such as prospective adopters are now thinking more carefully about adopting sibling groups because of the costs of raising a child.

The Chair commented that services were seeing an increased demand whilst there was less resource available to help. It was a difficult situation and it was hoped that as and when the NQSWs completed their assessed year in practice and were able to take on increased and more complex caseloads the benefits to the service would be realised as costs and reliance on agency staff could reduce accordingly.

A question was posed in relation to the acceptability of the Council seeking to make a profit from traded services? The Senior Finance Manager advised that the Council had to cover its costs and suggested that 'sustainable' would be a more appropriate word to use than profitable.

The Chair registered her concerns that the deficit was increasing however she acknowledged that officers were doing all they could to try to mitigate the impact.

Resolved

That the Panel notes:-

- 1. That the 2013/14 forecasted year - end financial position for services under the remit of the Children and Young People's Panel is a net revenue overspend of £2.236m after the use of approved reserves and carry forwards and action planning;**
- 2. That the capital programme is forecast to be a net capital underspend of £8.616m after carry forward requests have been taken into account.**

391/14 INTEGRATED YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUPPORT SERVICES; SERVICE OVERVIEW, PERFORMANCE, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES AND IMPACT OF BUDGET REDUCTIONS/BRIEFING NOTE ON ENCOURAGING/PROVIDING APPRENTICESHIPS.

The Head of Service presented a report which detailed the development of the Integrated Young Peoples Support Service (IPYSS) in 2010 following the integration of three separate service areas (Youth Service, Connexions and the Youth Justice System) into one set of coherent set of leadership arrangements, alignment to the Area Partnership structure and development of a new service area 'Targeted Youth Support'.

A discussion ensued as to how effectiveness was measured in relation to Walsall IYPSS's contribution to the reduction in youth related Anti Social Behaviour (ASB). Within the report it was stated that the National Youth Agency had completed a review in relation to ASB and stated that 'the contribution by detached youth workers and positive activities has been integral to that success'.

A member requested further details as to the provision for 8 – 12 year olds. In response, the Head of Service agreed to circulate the information to Members. It was explained that a number of options were being considered such as extending the age range of existing youth nights to compensate for any closures.

The Chair sought clarity as to how many young people the Education Business Partnership (EBP) had actually engaged with. The Head of Service agreed to provide a briefing note detailing the work of the EBP together with the number and types of intervention.

Clarity was sought as to the number of young people not in Education, Employment and Training (NEETS). The Panel were advised that there were 550 – 600 young people between 16/18 that had or were receiving careers information and guidance across the borough. The number of NEETS had been reduced and was below the statistic neighbour, mean figure.

The Chair noted that the service had been tasked with finding £615k of budget reductions for 2014/15 and asked whether this would reduce the scope of the service? The Head of Service advised that there would be differences and that some areas would be impacted upon more than others. It was important to mitigate the impact of the savings wherever possible. Members were reassured that the service could be managed and maintained.

The Chair requested further details regarding apprenticeships whilst seeking clarity on the removal of young apprenticeship posts by three. In response, the Head of Service advised that the model was being changed and clarified that the posts were vacant. The reduction would support a remodelling of the IYPSS and enable more focus on pre apprenticeship work.

The Chair made reference to 4.4.1 of the report which identified a budget reduction by reducing educational resources and media campaigns targeting teenage pregnancy reduction. Given that 3.3 & 3.4 of the report identified that teenage pregnancy in Walsall was reducing at a slower pace than nationally and that the rolling rate for teenage pregnancy is higher than that of the West Midlands, this was concerning. It was suggested that this saving should not be carried out, however, the Head of Service remarked that it was a small amount.

The Panel considered a briefing note on apprenticeships. The Regeneration Employment & Skills Manager explained that the government saw the national apprenticeship programme as a key mechanism to drive up UK business productivity, generate sustainable economic growth, increase social mobility, decrease youth unemployment and extend social inclusion.

The Walsall Works programme was discussed which received funding of £2.2m from the Council. It was confirmed that over 1800 young people had registered with Walsall Works and nearly 1,000 of these had achieved an outcome such as entry onto a traineeship, pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, employment or have returned to full or part time education.

Members sought clarity regarding pre apprenticeships. The Regeneration Employment & Skills Manager advised that this was a 24 week programme that offered young people support to get ready to start a full apprenticeship which will enable them to gain:-

- Literacy, Numeracy & ICT Skills
- Employability Skills
- Customer Care
- 4 week work placement
- Intensive Job Search
- Guaranteed job interview
- City & Guilds qualifications in a desired sector
- Accreditation to a Level 1 qualifications

A member queried how well Walsall Works had been explained to schools as they had been advised by one school that they had not heard of the scheme. In response, the Regeneration Employment & Skills Manager advised that there were difficulties accessing some schools as they were reluctant to allow access. The Assistant Director – Preventative and Targeted Services advised that Prospects had links with schools and that clarified that any schools which were reluctant would be contacted to ensure that access was provided.

The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that all schools had a governing body that had a duty to get independent advice and guidance however schools could choose how they wished to access this resource. Young people can get advice in a number of ways but the important matter was that young people know how to access this advice. Members requested a briefing note setting out the provision offered to schools.

Resolved

- 1. That the Assistant Director (Preventative and Targeted Services) reconsider the saving in respect of educational resources and media campaigns targeting teenage pregnancy;**
- 2. That the Head of Service:-**
 - a. Provides a briefing note setting out, in detail, the costs of providing educational resources and media campaigns to target teenage pregnancy and the service provided;**
 - b. Provides further details to Members regarding provision for 8 – 12 year olds.**
 - c. Provides a note setting out the advice services available to young people together with the services offered to schools and take up of those services.**

392/14 EXCEPTION REPORT

The Panel considered a report [annexed] which focussed on Caseloads, Agency Staff, and Early Help, in accordance with the request of the Panel at a previous meeting.

The Chair commented that referrals to the Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST) were high which was concerning. The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that referrals did not drop throughout the school holidays, which was unusual. work was underway with health colleagues to ensure that there was better understanding around referrals as there had been occasions when single events were being referred. A lot of work had and continued to be carried out with early help workers to support them to hold a level of risk and co –ordinate resources to manage

those risks to ensure a positive outcome for children and families. It was also possible that referrals reflected the fact that there was now a higher level of confidence in the Authority in that concerns would be taken forward and considered. It was a matter of delivering the right services at the right time.

Members reflected on chart 1 contained within the report which detailed caseload average by service. It was explained that a fourth team had been introduced which had had a positive effect within the Initial Response Service. This had enabled workers in teams to better manage the throughput of cases and also enabled staff to take toils and annual leave which provided them with time to recharge. Work had been carried out to the building which enabled better communication between teams. The family room had also been updated which was a recommendation of the Safeguarding Working Group.

The Chair requested an update on the PARIS system and its replacement. It was explained that the Interim Assistant Director, Specialist Services had met with the PARIS project manager and a change board had been established, chaired by the interim Executive Director, Children's Services, to oversee the changes. There were two systems which were predominantly used by Authorities who are currently rated as 'Good' or 'Better' by Ofsted which would be considered and tested before a procurement exercise would be undertaken. It was anticipated that a new system would be in place in November, 2014. The Chair stated that it was important that existing data was ready to be migrated into the new system to ensure a smooth transition. The QA and Performance Information Manager (Head of Service) advised that the existing system had been improved and journey mapping was underway. It was further explained by the Interim Assistant Director, Specialist Services that a data cleansing exercise had been undertaken to ensure that the information on the system was correct with particular regard to Looked after Children. The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that the PARIS system was not fit for purpose and was time consuming to use. Considerable effort had been put into ensuring that clean data was in the PARIS system ready for migration. It was also explained that PARIS was not attractive to potential employees and that changing the system would assist in attracting staff to the Council.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

393/14 CHILDRENS CENTRES

The Panel received an updated briefing note, tabled at the meeting, which detailed progress on the reshape of Children's Centres to meet changing policy requirements and to reduce overall costs.

The Assistant Director – Preventative and Targeted Services referred to the recruitment to the Early help teams. It was explained that reducing centre managers from 18 to 6 was a significant challenge which resulted in some unsuccessful candidates. All unsuccessful candidates were being supported and were on the redeployment list. There were 10 vacancies within the new structure available however these may be at a lower salary and it was for individuals to decide whether to apply. If it isn't possible to recruit to these positions then they would be advertised externally.

The Chair questioned the 'reach' i.e. the number of children served by each cluster and whether staffing would be varied accordingly. It was explained that the new Children's Centre clusters were pinned to local Area Partnership areas. Initially resources would be deployed evenly for a transition year which would help inform where and how resources should be applied in future. Locations of centres would also be considered, however, a decision had not been taken.

A member asked whether it was still a statutory requirement to have a qualified teacher at each centre? Officers advised that this was no longer the case.

A member of the Panel asked what impact the £500k savings on resource allocation would have on the service? The Chair advised that it was a good question, however, it was too early to be able to address it. It was suggested that the matter be considered in 2014/15 and that an item be placed on the work programme. Members were advised by officers that Children's Centres had significant assurance by Audit and should this change resources would be provided to address any issues.

Resolved

- 1. That the briefing note be noted;**
- 2. That an item entitled 'impact of budget reductions' be added to the work programme for 2014/15.**

394/14 THEMATIC INSPECTION OF EARLY HELP ARRANGEMENTS IN WALSALL

The Panel considered a report providing a summary of the provisional findings of the Ofsted Thematic Inspection of Early Help arrangements in Walsall undertaken on 21 and 22 January, 2014, and proposed next steps.

The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that the areas for development, identified by inspectors were of no surprise. The Chair stated that she understood that Ofsted appreciate Authorities with an open and honest approach and indications were that this is what the inspection team found in Walsall.

The Chair sought further clarity around case recording and management oversight as this was identified as requiring improvement. The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that early help management oversight was immature across the country as support within early help was not well developed. Work was underway to ensure there was a consistent approach and that sufficient time was available to record, discuss, review and provide constructive challenge during supervisions. There was a need to focus more on the child. It was also stated that the Area Family Support Teams required to reshape their focus to more of a co-ordinating role rather than working cases themselves.

In closing, the Interim Executive Director, Children's Services referred members to 4.3 of the report which explained that Ofsted had invited Walsall to provide a brief summary of three areas of good practice:-

- Housing Support and Early Help;
- Early Help 'Meet the Teams' fortnight for staff and partners;
- Early Help engagement sessions for staff and partners.

The information would be circulated to Members.

The Chair noted that consistent concerns had been identified relating to Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service for 13 and 14 year olds. It was noted that the Care Quality Commission would be addressing this issue during March, 2014.

Resolved

- 1. That the summary of good practice be circulated to Members of the Panel;**
- 2. That the report be noted.**

395/14 THE REPORT OF HER MAJESTY'S CHIEF INSPECTOR OF EDUCATION (HMCI)/WALSALL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

A report was considered which provided an overview of the HMCI report together with an update on school improvement within Walsall.

The Chair remarked that English and mathematics linked closely to many of the key messages.

The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services stated that further work needed to be carried out as Walsall ranked really low with the number of schools 'good' or 'better' in the national league tables which was not good enough.

Discussion ensued as to what was being undertaken to halt the decline of schools together with how Walsall school improvement was offering support and challenge to improve the number of children attending good and outstanding schools.

The Chair requested clarity as to a recent report in local press which stated that schools were being asked to pay £10 per pupil to pay for improvements. The Interim Executive Director, Children's Services advised that the report had taken information from Schools Forum papers and had been reported out of context. It was explained that a surplus had been created after the SERCO transfer that could be distributed to schools via a formula. An alternative option was considered which would have used funds to maximise the benefit by providing match funding for schools i.e.: £10 per pupil by the school would be match funded using the surplus from the Serco transfer to provide a learning consortium to help broker and exchange good practice between schools.

The Chair stated that she was hopeful that signs of improvement would begin to show as some schools had been a problem for years.

A member questioned why some schools had not been inspected since 2007? It was explained that schools which were 'outstanding' would be left for longer before being re-inspected although a desktop risk assessment would still be carried out by Ofsted. The member asked whether some of the schools ratings had come down to which officers explained that they may do at a school's next inspection as the inspection bar had risen; however, over time all schools were due an inspection by Ofsted.

In closing, the Chair extended the Panels thanks to Louise Hughes, Assistant Director – Preventative and Targeted Services for her services to the Panel and wished her well in her retirement.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

396/14 **WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD PLAN**

Members considered the work programme and forward plan (annexed).

Resolved

That the work programme and forward plan be noted.

397/14 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as 8 April, 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

The meeting terminated at 8.00 p.m.

Chair:

Date:.....